

THIS PUBLICATION IS

PREPARED BY THE INTERCULTURAL

AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE UNIT

DIRECTORATE EXTERNAL

POLICIES - REGIONS

Dialoguiural and religious O GUI

The EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue activities 2014-2019



from left to right: Jan Olbrycht MEP, Manfed Weber MEP Chaiman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and György Hölvényi MEP

The Working Group on 'Intercultural and Religious Dialogue' is an official structure of the EPP Group and is co-chaired by György Hölvényi MEP and Jan Olbrycht MEP, in which a number of EPP Group Members of the European Parliament gather monthly to deal with religious and intercultural issues.

The EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue activities aim to promote mutual understanding and an active sense of European citizenship for a peaceful living together. Decision makers are called to provide answers to the complex crisis with political, economic, religious and cultural implications in Europe.

'Intercultural and Religious Dialogue' does not mean theological discussions in the European Parliament. It is about listening to people from the sphere of religion and exchanging views with representatives of academia, governments, European Institutions on issues of common interest or concern and in connection to religion and intercultural relations.

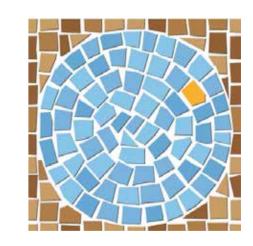
WHAT WE DO:

Our concept is simple: we bring people together. No other political group in the European Parliament runs a similar permanent structure. The Lisbon Treaty's Article 17 lays down the legal basis for the dialogue and encourages politicians, religious leaders and experts to strive for more cooperation. We believe that dialogue opens doors

to greater understanding and can be a catalyst for building social cohesion. The ultimate goal of the EPP Group 'Intercultural and Religious Dialogue' is to assist in the important effort to pursue intercultural exchange, people to people dialogue, peace-building initiatives and the strengthening of social cohesion. The dialogue is a powerful tool to bring this about and the EPP Group is a key player in such exchanges.

OUR ACTIVITIES:

Our events provide for interaction at the highest possible level between religious authorities and politicians. We aim to spread information about EPP Group' policy initiatives; represent the religious and cultural aspects regarding a number of policy areas; contribute to an attractive vision of modern Christian Democracy in Europe; reinforce non-negotiable European fundamental values and promote a model of society that strengthens cohesion and peaceful coexistence of cultures.



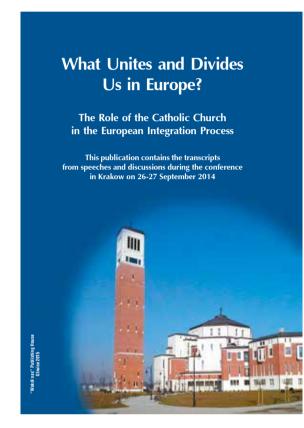
WE ORGANISE A WIDE RANGE OF EVENTS ON A REGULAR BASIS:

- > EPP Group Annual Dialogue with Religions and Cultures;
- > Monthly Working Group meetings;
- Thematic Working Breakfasts with Ambassadors of Muslim (OIC) Countries;
- Visits of religious leaders from the Middle East, Africa and Asia;
- > Conferences on current affairs related to religion (Religious radicalisation, Persecution of religious minorities);
- > Seminars on relevant topics with the participation of experts from EU and non-EU countries.

The Group's Intercultural Dialogue activities for cused primarily on the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. Designated meetings included the Annual Conference in Krakow and the 17th Annual Intercultural Dialogue, hosted in Brussels.

Events in the wider Middle East impacted heavily on the 2014 Interreligious Dialogue activities. The EPP Group was at the forefront in placing the plight of Christians on the political agenda. Participants from Iraq, Syria and Egypt detailed events relating from verbal harassmen to hanging, to the persecution of Christians and religious groups due to ethnic violence and geo-political conflict. Representatives sought support from MEPs to defend freedom of religion and basic human values. Discussions additionally centred on religious pluralism as part of the EU's external policy and dedicated EU aid for refugees and displaced Christian populations. EPP Group politicians stressed that religious freedom is a universal right contributing to the flourishing of multi-religious societies. Therefore, the international community should make every effort to ensure freedoms are respected.

XIV International Conference in Krakow



The EPP Group co-organised the 14th Conference Krakow in cooperation with the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow. Religious leaders, academics and European politicians focused on the guestion "What Unites and Divides us in Europe?" In his opening remarks H.E. Cardinal Dr Stanislaw Dziwisz, Archbishop of Krakow, pointed out that European society risks forgetting its Christian heritage roots, thus challenging essential values. The life-giving soul of Europe rests in its Christian heritage; however, the continent is more and more severed from its Christian soul. He emphasised the importance of European integration, which has resulted in peace among Member States over the past 50 years. However, there is still much to do to bridge the gap that divides European society.

17th Annual EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue, Brussels, 10-11 December



THE 17th EPP GROUP ANNUAL INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE A SILENT WAR anfred WEBER MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliamen Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, EPP Group in the European Parliament Mariya GABRIEL MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliamer György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, EPP Group in the European Parliament n: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria

EPP Group On 10-11 December 2014, the EPP Group hosted its 17th Annual Interreligious Dialogue, the Conference entitled "Persecution of Religious Minorities in Conflict Regions". With the presence of representatives from crisis areas and from countries hosting displaced peoples, the EPP Group centred discussions on the humanitarian emergency and the continuous attack against religious minorities. The meeting hosted representatives from Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Kurdistan, countries affected by persecutions and hosting displaced people. Discussions focused on the deterioration in global religious freedom over the past two years. It was further noted, due to the threat posed by Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria, that the Christian

minority in the region faced extermination. The

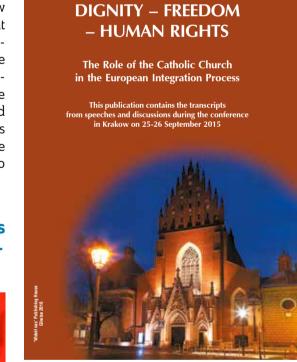
importance of education and development as a

way to prevent fear and manipulation among the to a deep debate on the current situation af- An EPP Group Hearing on the Persecution of Lebanon plays a key role in the security, stabimaining Christians in the Middle East. In responding to the growing persecution of Christians, ring the future of Christians in the Middle East.

The most relevant issues in 2015 centred on the

ortance of religion, social cooperation and religious discrimination. Religion is more important globally than at any time in the last 20 years. It is no longer possible to view religion as something of only private relevance, largely nected to broader political and security issues. Therefore, it is important to pay particular attention to the strong correlations between religious freedom and social stability and political moderation, both inside and outside the EU. Religious leaders highlighted the importance of promoting dialogue aimed at preventing conflicts in their countries. It is also essential to support fundamental values, such as respect for human dignity, the rule of law, respect for universal human rights, freedom of religion and freedom of expression. In contemporary European and global politics, there are numerous major problems that can only be solved by broad social cooperation. The economic crisis, ever-increasing social tension and issues related to migration are all global challenges that the EU faces today. It is important for the EPP Group to have knowledge of the thoughts and activities of churches and religious organisations relating to these issues. There is an urgent need to cooperate, coordinate, and exchange experiences, and to ensure that the best ideas and practices can be shared throughout the European Union. Political and religious bodies have special responsibility and a primary role to play. There is an increase in anti-religious incidents that target all three monotheistic religions in Europe. Consequently, as Group Members and participants emphasised, every form of discrimination against religions must be countered with efficient initiatives. In this context several challenges issues must be considered. These include historical, socio-economic, religious-cultural and humanitarian; therefore all societal actors should be involved.

XV International Conference in



The Annual Conference entitled the "Role of the Catholic Church in the process of the European Integration" took place on 25-26 September in Krakow. The conference was organised in cooperation with the European People's Party, the Polish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, COMECE and the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow. The main subject concerned "Dignity, Freedom and Human Rights". The Conference was opened by Stanisław Dziwisz, Cardinal of Krakow who stated: "Europe must return to the roots of Christianity - the source of our civilisation. This is the foundation of human dignity".

18th Annual EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue, Prague, 11-12 December



On 11 and 12 December in Prague, the EPP Group hosted its 18th Interreligious Dialogue on "Migration: A Response to a Forced Displacement". EPP Groups Members, representatives from EU Institutions, from churches, religious institutions and international organisations contributed

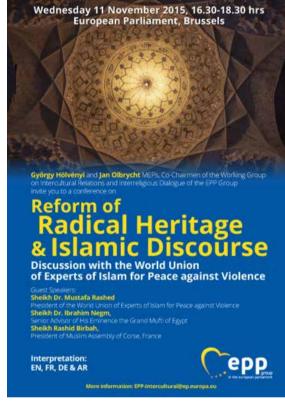
ned the 18th Annual Dialogue by highlighting was attended by Cardinal Dominik Duka, from foreign policy. the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Vice- President of sion concentrated on the broader Middle East the Conference of the European Churches; and region, notably the cases of Syria and Iraq, and by Rabbi Karol Sidon, Chief Rabbi of Prague. The the second on other areas of the world, by giving EU Institutions were represented by Christos examples from Asia to Africa. Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, who explained and provided statistics regarding the EU engagement for helping refugees and migrants.

Dialogue with Islam



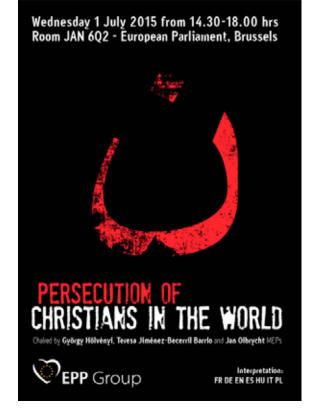
The EPP Group is highly experienced regarding Dialogue with Islam. In May, the EPP Group organised its annual working lunch with the Ambassadors of the 56 Islamic countries. Antonio Tajani MEP (IT), at that time, Vice-President of the European Parliament, opened the session by underlying that religious conflicts, terrorism and international tensions are undermining cooperation between societies. He asked for more cooperation between the EU and the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in order to facilitate mutual understanding and to set up

Conference on Reform of Radical Heritage and Islamic Discourse



In November, the EPP Group organised a Conference on 'Reform of Radical Heritage and Islamic Discourse'. "The World Union of Experts of Islam for Peace and against Violence", a nascent and emergent organization its Constituent Council is composed of nine Imams, from 8 countries on five continents (USA, Australia, Egypt, France, etc). They received support from 500 religious and the accession of 14 Sheikhs trained at the University "Al Azhar" in Cairo. Their goal was to spread the concept of peace between peoples and religions in the Islamic world, through books, preaching, newspapers, media, internet, and the reform of the traditions and heritage, either oral or written. Their objective joined the one announced by the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi at the Great Mosque of Al Azhar on December 28, 2015, who called for the eradication of hate ideology, for the reform of religious discourse and for a religious revolution.

Hearing on the Persecution of Christians in the World

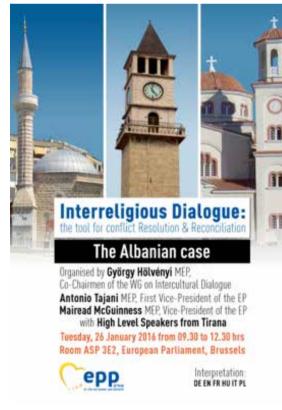


population was underlined. The rise of the Califecting millions of displaced people in the EU Christians in the World was organised in July. The lity, and economy of the Levant and the broad phate (IS) and its quest for power and influence neighbourhood, and the EU response to this hearing raised awareness at EU-level and provider Middle East and it is an arena for sectarian was highlighted; IS is attempting to eradicate re-increasing phenomenon. Manfred Weber MEP ded a follow-up for the motion for resolution on and geopolitical competition. The instability in (DE), Chairman of the EPP Group in the EP, ope- the persecution of Christians in the world, in re- the Middle East today represents a serious danlation to the killing of students in Kenya by terror ger for the multi-religious and multi-confessio-Europe has a responsibility to support those at the massive exodus from the Middle East and group al-Shabaab, adopted on 30 April 2015 in nal Lebanese society. All groups that stand for risk. Increased dialogue with Muslims as well as the need of a stronger cooperation between EU Strasbourg by Members of the European Parlia-peaceful solutions must be strongly supported strengthening NGOs are key elements to secu- Member States in order to take care of people in ment. In this resolution, Members condemned by the EU. Christianity has been an integral part need. Churches and international organisations the persecution of Christians and called on the of the fabric of the Middle-Eastern society for are providing fundamental support, but need EU and its Member States to address the persetwo millennia. The EPP Group is determined to more aid from the EU Institutions. The meeting cution of Christians as a priority issue for their maintain good relations with them because Eu-Prague; by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, of The hearing consisted of two parts: the first ses- major political and societal challenges.

In 2016, many religious leaders from European and non-EU countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Ni geria, and Pakistan) met with the EPP Group embers. Discussions, both in the EP and abroad, were primarily focused on 'religion and politics' and the international political agenda, with government representatives and representatives from Christian, Islamic and Judaism iths. The most relevant issues in 2016 were ased on the worldwide influence of religion on the political and social spheres. Religion is more important globally than at any time in the last 20 years. It is no longer possible to view religion as something of only private relevance, largely unconnected to broader political and security issues. In contemporary European and global politics, there are numerous major problems that can only be solved by broad social cooperation. The economic crisis, ever-increasing social ten sion and issues related to migration are global challenges that the EU faces today. There is also an increase of anti-religious incidents that target all three monotheistic religions in Europe. For these reasons the EPP Group increased its initiatives and activities to improve discussions with churches and religious organisations

In 2016, the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue developed concrete political actions, which served to strengthen links with political and religious representatives, with civil society and other relevant persona-

Interreligious Dialogue: the Tool for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation. The Albanian Case'



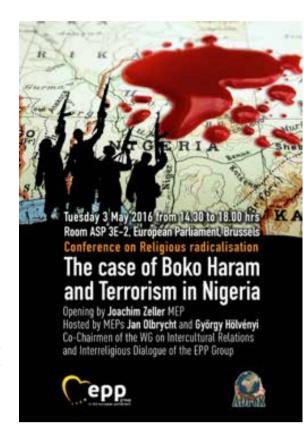
Albania represents a remarkable example of peaceful coexistence between Jews, Christians and Muslims. Respecting others is a pre-condition for a multi-religious society. Therefore, continuous efforts to understand the aspects of other religions are needed to safeguard peace among various religious and ethnic communities. Opportunities for regular exchanges are crucial features in these efforts.

Consequences of rge conflicts in the Middle-East on the Christians and their future



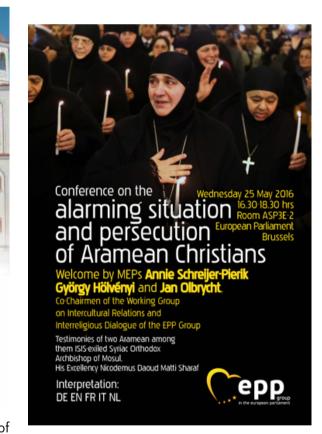
rope needs reliable allies in the region to face

Religious Radicalisation: The Case of **Boko Haram and Terrorism in Nigeria**



It is essential to underline that in Nigeria there are vital challenges for Christians, people with indigenous beliefs and Muslims. The reports that appear in the media are only the tip of the iceberg, as many violations go unreported. Many causes of violence in Nigeria are significantly rooted in the British colonial social-economic structure, as well as the lack of will of Nigeria's political elite to change it and to "build an integrative society". In fact, Nigeria is a complex case because there are several perpetrators that use organized violence and are interlinked. Some conflicts are 'over land issues', but there lities from the cultural, economic or university field. is also a religious factor. There are ethno-politic and economic reasons, although the common denominator is religious.

The Alarming Situation and Persecution of Aramean Christians



real genocide is taking place in the 21st century, i.e. the complete eradication of Christianity in the Middle East. Iragi and Syrian Christian religious leaders emphasized that Christians are not only suffering collaterally in the conflicts between Muslims but, there is an ongoing and advanced attempt to eradicate their communities in the Muslim-majority societies of the Middle East. The dispersal of the communities will cause major changes in the political and economic life of the whole region, affecting society and is likely to lead to chaos in an already fragile and conflict-ridden Middle East. Consequently, there is an urgent need to transcend different geopolitical interests because the old number of two million Iragi Christians has fallen below 300,000.

Meeting with Patriarchs from Syria for a discussion on the current situation in Syria

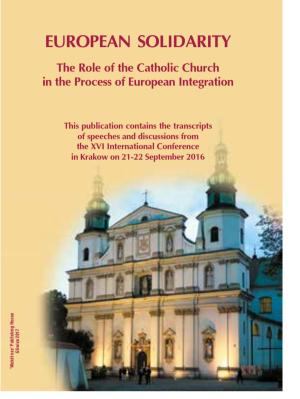


ment responsible for Article 17 and His Beatitude Patriarch of Anioch and All the East, and Alexandria and Jerusalem, Gregorios III aham, Spiritual leader of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church

The EPP Group has called on all sides to end the war in Syria and bring peace to the region so that reconciliation can begin, with the help of interreligious dialogue in the different commu nities. The Patriarchs informed that over 15,000 children have been tragically killed in the Syrian war, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (September 2016). 2,960 schools have been destroyed in the war and 2.1 million Syrian children are unable to attend school due to the conflict that has been ongoing for over five and half years. The patriarchs presented the MEPs with hundreds of very poignant messages and drawings from Syrian schoolchildren depicting their life in Syria, at school, with friends and

lity of life for children in Syria at present. The appeal for peace is a joint initiative by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christians in Syria and has the support of members of all other religious communities in Syria. Churches have taken responsibility for the welfare of about 300,000 refugees in Syria and after humanitarian aid; their main aim is to provide education for those children who cannot attend school to provide some normality of life for youth.

XVI International Conference in Krakow



'European Solidarity' was the title of the Krakow XVI International Conference, 'Solidarity, this is a time to build and to unite the new relationships Krakow among nations and people in Europe. Solidarity means also the dialogue between Christians and other believers or others religions, sometimes

19th Annual EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue, Venice, 20-21 October

not friendly oriented.



Peace and security for Europe and its neighbours and the central role of interreligious dialogue was on top the agenda at the 19th annual EPP Group Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions in Venice on Thursday and Friday this week (20-21 October).

"This year's annual conference is taking place at a very significant and challenging time. In consideration of current conflicts in the Middle East and the challenges of migration at European and global level, we will focus on peace creation, security and the role of interreligious dialogue. We will hear first-hand accounts from conflict-hit zones from local leaders and seek solutions with the participation of European officials engaged in international development and humanitarian action. Even if a conference like this cannot create peace in itself, I very much believe that such a dialogue of leaders from various institutions can facilitate the process of rebuilding stability", György Hölvényi MEP said.

MEPs Hölvényi and Jan Olbrycht, as Co-Chairmen of the EPP Group's Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue, were hosting panels on future challenges and strengthening EU external aid effectiveness with contributions from policy-makers and religious

gions enables us to improve the understanding of the cultural and religious traditions both in Europe and in our neighbouring regions. Based on that, we are working towards constructive cooperation in order to face today's challenges. They include, but are not limited to, social integration, especially in response to the ongoing migration and refugee crisis, and the protection of religious and ethnic minorities in Europe's neighbourhood and beyond", Olbrycht added.

017 marked an important milestone in the histo of EPP Group Intercultural Dialogue Activity: i arked the 20th anniversary of continuous and structured Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions. Therefore, the 2017 EPP Group annual Dialogue Conference was held in Zagreb, Croatia, with the aim of celebrating this unique area of activity that has been introduced, elaborated and expanded upon by the EPP Group over the two past decades. Throughout 2017, a their family against the harrowing backdrop of number of events were held aimed to fulfil EPP war. The messages illustrated the horrifying rea-Group political priorities by providing an interactive debating forum for religious authorities and politicians. The events helped to reinforce existing links and support the elaboration of fu-

> Thematic events: covered widely debated political religious, social and cultural issues. The goal was to further expand cooperation in areas related to migration, social cohesion, security and conflict resolution. A priority in 2017 involved debating means by which best to provide assistance in the humanitarian field with regard to persecuted Christians and other religious communities worldwide.

External visits to places of political and religious significance in 2017, included Lebanon; Paris, France; Krakow, Poland; and Zagreb, Croatia.

Ultimately, Dialogue activities in 2017 further helped to spread information concerning EPP Group policy initiatives. They contributed to the presentation of an attractive idea of modern Christian Democracy in Europe as Dialogue reinforces non-negotiable European fundamental values as well as promoting a model of society that strengthens cohesion and the peaceful coexistence of cultures.

XVII International Conference in



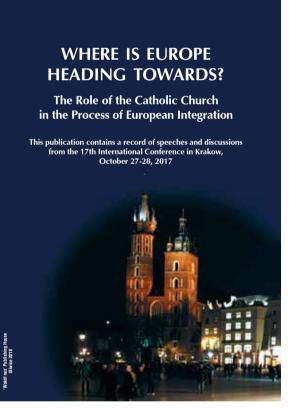
The OIC is not a religious organisation: it is a po-

litical body consisting of 57 states. Nevertheless,

with an aim of countering dangerous trends in society, the OIC does encourage religious and community leaders, as agents of change, to actively help promoting peace and development; and to address the root causes of intolerance and discriminations based on religion. Needless to say, parliamentarians, as opinion-leaders and law-makers, are best placed to encourage informed debate on these important issues and to help in the adoption of necessary national legislations and of course at the European level, to be more precise, here. Open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue can play a positive role in combating negative religious stereotyping, hatred, incitement, violence and extremism. "Dialogue with representatives of different reli-

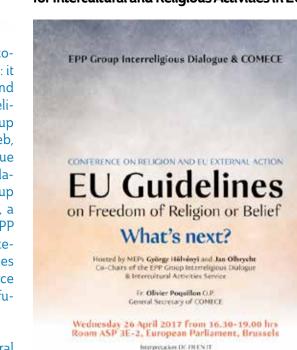
The following posters present an overview of Visits the conferences carried out by the Directorate for Intercultural and Religious Activities in 2017

he EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue proved a suitable and important platform for regular and structured cooperation with Churches and religious organisations. Dialogue is based on the conviction that cooperation among decision makers and representatives of religious organisations is essential and necessary. Citizens expect elected representatives to provide solutions to multifaceted crises with political, economic, cultural and religious implications. Thus, a variety of activities were organised in 2017.



EPP Group Annual Dinner with Ambassadors of OIC Countries





4

Global Ethic

World Religions

Universal Peace

Hosted by György Hölvenyi MEP. Co-Chairman

of the Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Opened by: Manfred Weber MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group

Mairead McGuinness MEP, First Vice-President responsible for

Gunther Gebhardt, Head of Interreligious Dialogue Department of the WELTETHOS Foundation

the European Parliament's dialogue with religions

Le donne nell'Islam

ra repressione ed emancipazione

EPP GROUP INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUI

Churches and Religious Organisations' accessibility

Christmas after Daesh:

lope reborn for Christians

in the Middle East

to EU Funding for Cooperation projects

Hosted by MEP György Hölvényi Co-Chair of the EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue & Intercultural Activities Service

Tuesday 27 June 2017 from 16:30-18:30 hrs Room ASP 5H-1, European Parliament, Brussi

ppe

Paris, France On 8 November 2017, a Delegation of EPP Group MEPs met at the 'Collège des Bernardins' in Paris. It was noted that the institution was built in the XIII century and became a centre of Latin education, theology, philosophy and literature. It EPP Group Working Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue was restored and opened to the public in 2008. The EPP Group Delegation underlined the role of religion in shaping society and values.

situation in Ukraine were conducted.

A Delegation of EPP Group MEPs participated in a

Conference entitled 'The Role of Religion in Euro-

pean Integration - Ukraine and EU Perspectives' or-

September. Deliberations between MEPs, religious

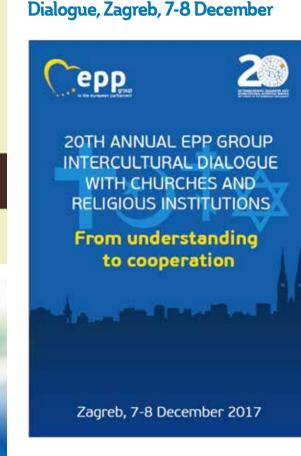
leaders (Christians, Muslim, Jewish) and political

authorities on the role of religion and the current

of the meetings.

Kiev, Ukraine

20th Annual EPP Group Intercultural



The aim was to promote interfaith encounters to meet global challenges. The main themes of the discussion centred on the role of religion in the tion and refugee crisis and its consequences on society and culture, and cooperation possibilities for mutual understanding.

The 20-year milestone provided a unique opportunity for debate by concentrating on the participation of churches in the debate on the situation in the Balkans. The meeting also presented an excellent opportunity to underline the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, which the EPP Group has been carrying out successfully for the last 20 years, and to take stock of that valuable experience to shape future policies.

Intercultural and Religious Dialogue are the very essence of the promotion of cultural pluralism, mutual understanding and mutual respect among people, religions and nations at large. Throughout 2018, the EPP Group was consistent in its support for such a dialogue in developing a culture of peace, tolerance and moderation as well as combatting extremism and radicalism. In order for such a dialogue to have deeper impact, it must be structured and conducted in such a way that it can reach the grassroots of society, through promoting tolerance and inclusivity, a significant feature of social cohesion, stability and peaceful coexistence.

hrough its numerous events, the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue the remaining Christian population is still exrepresented a solid platform for discussions between posed to serious existential threats and martyrpoliticians and high-level religious representatives (Christians, Jewish, Muslims) and organisations.

from understanding to cooperation, can learn from ropean aid for reconstruction. each other and figure out a way to establish real Interreligious cooperation, where they have the same common meaning in the different fields of society.

High-level Conferences with religious representatives were organised in Tbilisi (Georgia), Krakow (Poland), Lisbon (Portugal) and the Vatican City (Vatican City and Rome). The meetings provided an excellent opportunity to underline the importance of Intercultural and Religious Dialogue. For instance, with a view to the EU Development Policy, it is of great importance to listen to religious experts and practitioners working in this specific area of development cooperation. MEPs and experts emphasise continuously that without the

involvement of the religions element in EU Development Policy, the EU will not be able to meet all its challenges. Especially in these times when religion is used as an argument to justify terrorism A Delegation of EPP Group MEPs discussed the and violence, there is an urgent need to improve current political and religious situation, and that of cooperation with religious communities for peace refugees and neighbouring crises, in meetings with and development. various representatives of different religious, insti-

tutional and political authorities and civil society. e EPP Group believes that religious leaders are The persecution of Christians, the threat posed by able to inspire actions for rebuilding societies. They terrorists, the Syrian war and fears for new crises in defend the basic ideas of respect for life and huthe Middle East and Lebanon topped the agenda man dignity, charity and solidarity. Such a task for religious leaders is especially important in times of conflicts and increasing religious intolerance.

he EPP Group can assist in this important effort o pursue Intercultural exchange, people-topeople dialogue, peace-building initiatives and ganised with the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches the strengthening of social cohesion. Dialogue is and Religious Organisations in Kiev from 18-19 a powerful tool and the EPP Group can be a key yer in such exchanges.

> In 2018, the EPP Group WG on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue developed and defended concrete political actions, which served to strengthen links with political and religious representatives, with civil society and other relevant personalities from the cultural, economic and academic fields

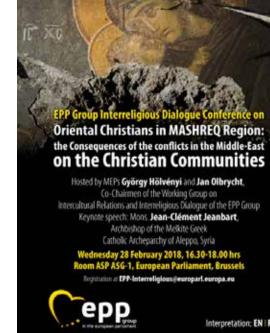
Tbilisi*,* Georgia

An EPP Group Delegation visited Tbilisi (Georgia) on 28-29 June in the framework of the Conference 'Role of Churches and Religious Communities in the European Integration Process: Georgia - EU Perspective.' It was an occasion to discuss the role of Churches in religious, social and political life in Georgia with representatives from academia and civil society as well as high representatives of Churches and religious communities. During the reception by His Holiness Patriarch of Whole Georgia - Ilia II - the importance of EU support to Georgia was underlined.

Vatican City (Vatican City and Rome)

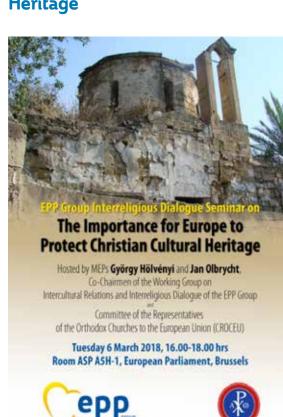
The visit focused on the new initiatives at the local, national, regional, and international levels of the Catholic Church aimed at promoting a culture that embraces encounter and fosters respect. The meetings with leaders of the Roman Curia shed light on the unique role that the organisations of the Catholic Church play in fostering interfaith and Intercultural dialogue and the dialogue with non-believers. The discussions highlighted the 'power of religion' in the promotion of peace and reconciliation as well as the maintenance of constructive channels of communication and collaboration among various

Conference on Oriental Christians uropean integration process, the current migrain MASHREQ Region: the Conse quences of the conflicts in the Middle-East on the Christian Com-



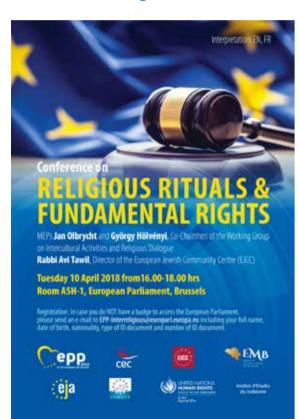
million Christians lived in the country, representing 10 percent of the overall population. By 2018, approximately two-thirds of the Christians escaped Syria. According to current estimations, dom. Christians in Syria are experiencing a historic moment as regards the preservation of their existence in the country. Churches and religious Political and religious leaders can move forward leaders are strategic partners for providing Eu-

Seminar on the Importance of Europe to Protect Christian Cultural Heritage



Christian cultural heritage has a universal value for people and societies. Across Europe, there are hundreds of thousands of churches, the continent's biggest living museum of architecture, history and faith, which we should preserve as our cultural heritage and source of our identity. As 2018 was the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue held a seminar on 6 March in the European Parliament on the importance of Europe protecting Christian cultural heritage.

Conference on Religious Rituals & Fundamental Rights



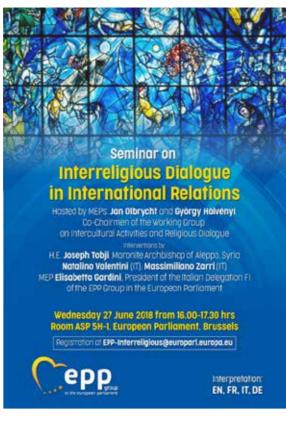
Freedom of religion, as a fundamental right, represents a central pillar of our society, and is the origin of manifold cultures, as we know them today. Despite this legacy, very often religion is portrayed or manipulated into something divisive by religious extremists and cynical opportunists. Religion acts as an identifier and promoter of the intrinsic shared values of life: respect of the other, the sanctity and a vision of a world that can and must achieve peace. Dialogue between cultures and differing ideologies is key for the social cohesion and the overall health of society.

Conference on Ukraine in Times of Independence



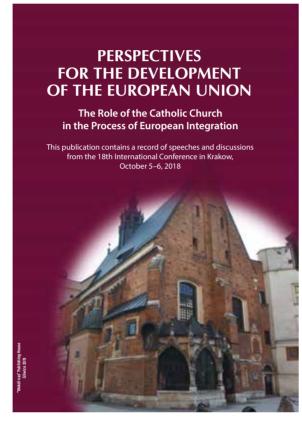
The Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, Patriarch Philaret, visited the European Institutions and held important meetings in the EP with President Tajani and EPP Group MEPs. Ukrainian Bishops and the Ukrainian Ambassador to the EU accompanied the Patriarch. The topic of the discussion was the difficult situation in Ukraine after the annexing of Crimea by Russian separatists.

Seminar on Interreligious Dialogue in International Relations



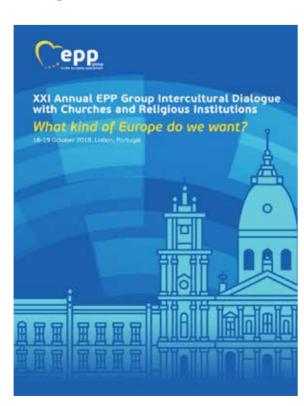
Conference with H.E. Joseph Tobij, Maronite Archbishop of Aleppo Archbishop Tobij explained the difficult situation faced by Christians in Aleppo. The city was destroyed: private and public buildings, hospitals and Churches were ruined. The food, water and medicine delivery was stopped by embargo. Foreign help was very difficult and poverty pervaded across the city. Now, the Archbishop is trying to raise funds to rebuild and renovate Churches, thus giving hope to the people.

XVIII International Conference in Krakow



under the title: "Perspectives for the development of the European Union". The programme of the two-day Conference included, above all, two essential speeches of prominent European politicians. By means of online connection, Antonio Tajani, the President of the European Parliament outlined the concept of prospective steps for the European Union's development after termination of the United Kingdom's membership. Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, presented the lecture entitled: "Perspectives for the development of Poland within the European Union", where he included his reflections after three years of holding one of the key offices in the EU structures, as well as the vision of the evolution of political situation in Europe, and the outside and inside threats faced by Europeans. The Conference brought together a number of politicians and also many journalists from Poland and other European countries, as well as international press agencies. As always, clerics were present among the participants and panellists, as well as several members of the Orthodox Church from Ukraine. During the two-day Conference, the International Cultural Centre in Kracow has been visited by around 30 speakers and panellists and over 450 attendees

21st Annual EPP Group Interreligious Dialogue, Lisbon, 18-19 October



The EPP Group 21st Annual Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions took place in Lisbon (Mafra- Ericeira) from 18-19

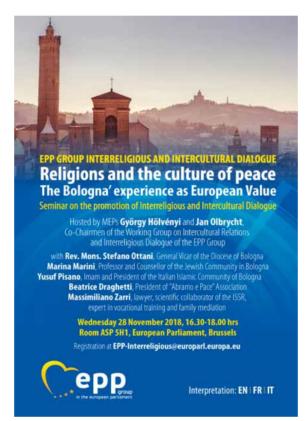
October 2018. EPP Group MEPs, including Chairman Manfred Weber, religious leaders and academics discussed the role of religion in debates on the Future of Europe. As the 2019 European elections approach, this Dialogue Conference was an extremely relevant event.

The agenda was divided into three main sessions and it included important issues such as the role of religion in the debate on the Future of Europe, family, education and youth as a primary source of society's human, social, economic and spiritual capital, and promoting peace and security in Europe and in EU external policies.

EPP Group MEPs underlined that Portugal, due to its geographical position as the most western country in Europe and to its centuries old global experience of evangelisation, is the right location to host and discuss issues related to Interreligious Dialogue.

Guest speakers included Rev. Olivier Poquillon, General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of the EU, Natan Peres, Rabbi of the Israelite Community of Lisbon, European and Portuguese politicians as well as intellectuals and academics. It was highlighted that, approaching the end of the current legislative period, the 2018 Dialogue offered the opportunity to overview how the EPP Group facilitated the visibility of the role of Churches and religious organisations during this Parliamentary term. It is high time to present all the achievements regarding Dialogue that the EPP Group carried out for religious freedom and beyond, and to define new directions for the future. It was furthermore pointed out that the significance of the debate on the Future of Europe foments dialogue between politicians, intellectuals, Churches and religious communities; this, participants agreed, is inevitable.

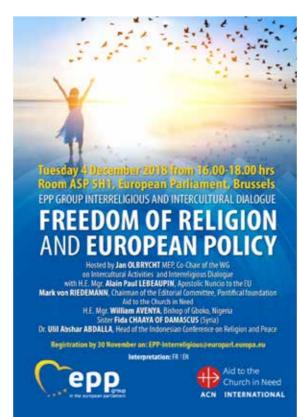
Religions and the culture of peace The Bologna' experience as European Value



Europe is increasingly multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious. The continent faces challenges posed by an evolving society, which sometimes expresses difficult and contradictory needs. Additionally, the last economic crisis and its consequences have also sharpened forms of incomprehension and rivalry between social classes as well as between different cultural expressions

In the city of Bologna, a unique model of dialogue was created in the frame of the Association "Abraham and Peace" to foster interreligious Dialogue and facilitate intercultural encounters. Msgr. Stefano Ottani, General Vicar of the Curia of the Archdiocese Bologna, talked about the initiatives undertaken by himself and the Curia, which have also seen the participation of the Jewish and Islamic communities, as Prof. Marina Marini and Yusuf Pisano explained it, together with the interventions of Beatrice Draghetti and Massimiliano Zarri.

Freedom of Religion and European Policy



Annual Report on 'Aid to the Church in Need' Presentation of the Religious Freedom in the World 2018 Report of the Pontifical Foundation 'Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).' The report is ACN's comprehensive assessment of the threat to religious liberty today. More than 190 nations were examined with a special focus in each case on the place of religious freedom in constitutional and other statutory documents, incidents of note and a projection of likely trends. The focus of the report is concerned with state and nonstate actors who restrict and deny religious expression, be it in public or in private, and who do so without due respect for others and for the rule of law.

2019

Today, Interreligious Dialogue belongs to the core identity of the EPP Group. No other political Group in the EP has this level of engagement. In its daily activities, the EPP Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Unit maintains contact with Churches and religious organisations, communities and NGO's, and has done so for more than 20 years. The objective is two-fold: to get to know the religious point of view on a number of policy areas, and to spread information about EPP Group policy initiatives. Intercultural and Religious Dialogue activities also aim to promote mutual understanding, a peaceful existence together and an active sense of European citizenship. Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty lays down the legal basis for such a dialogue and encourages us to strive for more cooperation. Interreligious Dialogue activities offer a historical perspective, with a timespan representing a third of the EU's history. The importance and relevance of such a dialogue increased enormously for Europe during the last two decades.

Film screening (première) of the movie: "White Right: Meeting the Enemy"



"When Deeyah Khan was six, her father took her to her first anti-racism rally. A Pakistani immigrant to Norway, he promised her that things would get better and that the skinhead gangs that terrorised their family and families like them would soon find themselves relics of past prejudices that bigotry belonged in history, that tomorrow would be a more tolerant time.

Following the lauded jihad – in which she spoke to radicalised British Muslims who had fought in the name of jihad on the battlefields of Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Chechnya and now found themselves full of regret – Deeyah joins the frontline of the race wars in America. She sits face-to-face with fascists, racists and the proponents of the "altright" ideologies. Deeyah's need to find the deeper human causes of horrific social forces opens a different possibility for connection and solutions. Rather than dismiss these men as monsters, she is determined to discover the men behind the masks".

Presentations by Christian university students from the Middle East, Asia and Africa

In 2017, the Government of Hungary launched the special programme "Scholarship for Christian Young People" to provide university scholarships for young people from Christian families from all over the world, in order to facilitate their access to high-quality university education. The "Scholarship for Christian Young People" programme provides university studies and full board in Hungary for Christian university students to enable them to use their European-level knowledge to help rebuild their countries, which have been ravaged by civil war or genocide, among others in Syria and Iraq. Apart from this, the programme focuses on several other regions of the Middle East, such as Egypt, Palestine or Lebanon, where an increasing interest for European higher education scholarships exist. The scholarship's most important goal is to enable Christians who are persecuted or suffer discrimination to remain in the land of their birth, and this is why it has also being extended to Nigeria, where terror group

Boko Haram poses a danger to Christians.

During their meetings in Brussels, the scholars present their unique testimonies on the situation

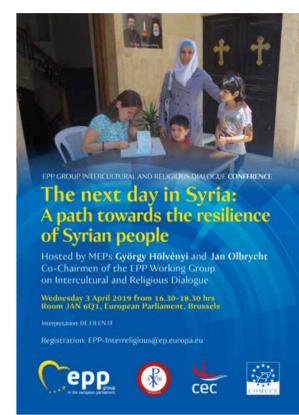
of Christianity in their countries of origin and their experiences on university studies in Hungary. In the 2018/19 academic year, 163 students began their studies from the following countries: Egypt, Lebanese republic, Republic of Iraq, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Republic of Kenya and Nigeria.

On the way of reconciliation and life in multi-ethnic society, Mostar and Medugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28-31 March 2019

The purpose of the visit was to meet with high-ranking Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish representatives as well as with representatives of NGO's, Civil society and Academia.

The meetings were an occasion to better understand the current situation in the multi-ethnic society, more than 20 years after the War in the region.

The next day in Syria: A path towards the resilence of Syrian people



Christian Churches are concerned about the fate of Syrian people, and their future, and share the common understanding that the right to return and to come back to daily life should be made effective without further delay.

Overall attention should be paid not only to short term-goals, but, to expand into long term-goals, including the reconstruction of the country (not only infrastructures, health care or education services but also economic life...) and ensuring a safe, "attractive" and viable environment for the returnees. In order to achieve this, stakeholders need to come up with practical solutions.

The event was held, for the first time, in cooperation with the three most relevant and Brussels based organisations of the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Churches: CROCEU, COMECE and CEC. The aim of this seminar was to exchange views about the current situation of people in Syria and to reflect on possible solutions (incl. legal ones) to promote the future normalization of their lives. As, for a variety of reasons, humanitarian aid provided to Syria is not always reaching all its population, one of the major points of interest would be to find the best way to fairly distribute resources for the resilience of Syrian people.

GET INVOLVED:

Members of the EPP Group are encouraged to actively take part of the dialogue and suggest ideas that can be incorporated in the series of activities.

Please contact the office of the two Co-Chairmen of the EPP Group Working Group on Intercultural Activities and Religious Dialogue:

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